

Egal Feldman, *The Dreyfus Affair and the American Conscience, 1895-1906*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981 ix + 187 pp. \$17.95.

Three studies have now appeared on the American reaction to the Dreyfus affair: Rose A. Halpern's 1941 M. A. thesis at Columbia University, Ronald A. Urquhart's 1972 Ph.D. dissertation at the same university, and now Egal Feldman's volume, the only one of the three to be published commercially. That so much attention has been focused on so narrow a subject would seem to indicate that the subject possesses vast importance, perhaps as a turning point in American or American Jewish life. Such, however, is not the case. The most that the Dreyfus affair by itself really offers an American historian, as Feldman candidly admits in his preface, is "an occasion to monitor and evaluate American observations of the legal, political, and social customs of France during a very critical period."

Given these limited possibilities, Egal Feldman acquits himself well. He surveys an immense account of literature, organizes it sensibly, and presents it, with copious quotations, in fairminded fashion. The views of Protestants, Catholics and Jews, Anglophiles and Francophiles, militarists and anti-militarists, lawyers, ministers and others all find expression in these pages, and where diversity of opinion exists, Feldman gives all sides a fair hearing. Few will question or express surprise at his general conclusion: "Except for American Catholics, there was general support in the United States for Captain Alfred Dreyfus and those Frenchmen who fought for justice on his behalf. However, not all Americans supported Dreyfus or were disturbed by events in France for the same reasons, nor did they draw the same practical lessons from the case." Native-born American Jews and Central European Jewish immigrants of longstanding residence spoke out less vigorously for Dreyfus and against French anti-Semitism than did more recent East European Jewish immigrants; the latter protested as vigorously as they could.

If Feldman's conclusion might have been anticipated, his interpretation happily provides deeper insight. He convincingly argues that responses to the Dreyfus affair reveal more about America and its internal conflicts than about France. He shows how different groups exploited the widespread interest in the affair to advance independently formulated positions on foreign affairs, militarism, social morality, Catholicism and jurisprudence. The affair, in other words, provided prooftexts for sermons already written. In similar fashion, he shows how it served as a barometer for measuring Jewish attitudes toward anti-Semitism and American exceptionalism, as well as Catholic attitudes toward liberalism and Church discipline. Since the affair did not intrude on many critical areas of public life, particularly domestic politics (William Jennings Bryan does not figure in these pages) and economics, Feldman cannot quite live up to his promise to use responses to the Dreyfus affair to "tell us about American estimates of their own life and institutions." But many of his observations are nevertheless suggestive.

Yet by focusing so narrowly on responses to the Dreyfus affair, he misses opportunities to shed light on important broader issues. The discussion of Jews and Catholics, for example, would have benefited from a retrospective glance back to the Mortara affair, the outcry following Church seizure of a forcibly converted Jewish child in Italy in 1858, when similar questions of liberalism versus Catholicism arose. A few paragraphs on Jewish responses to anti-Catholicism in America, and sidelong glances at Jewish-Catholic cooperation on issues related to immigration, Americanization and opposition to Protestant evangelicalism would also have added perspective. Similarly, comparisons might have been made to the two so-called "American Dreyfus cases," and the reactions to them: the Lauchheimer Controversy of 1910-1912 (see Wayne Wiegand in *Military Affairs* XL [1976] 54-59) and the better known case of Robert Rosenbluth, 1921-1924 (see Rosemary Davis, *The Rosenbluth Case: Federal Justice on Trial*, 1970). Finally, the whole subject of American government and popular concern with human rights violations in other nations deserves a more substantial analysis than this brief volume provides.

In short, what Feldman has done, he has done well. But this is a limited study.

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